
The Reverend Dr. RUTHERFORTHS

S E R M O N

Preached before the Honourable

HOUSE OF COMMONS

JANUARY 30. 1745-6.

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Veneris 31^o die Januarii 1745.

ORdered, That the thanks of this house be given to the Rev^d Dr. RUTHERFORTH, for the sermon by him preached yesterday before this house, at St. Margarets Westminster; and that he be desired to print the same; and that Mr. BURRELL and Mr. JENINGS do acquaint him therewith.

N. HARDINGE,
Cl. Dom. Com.

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St. MAGRARETS WESTMINSTER

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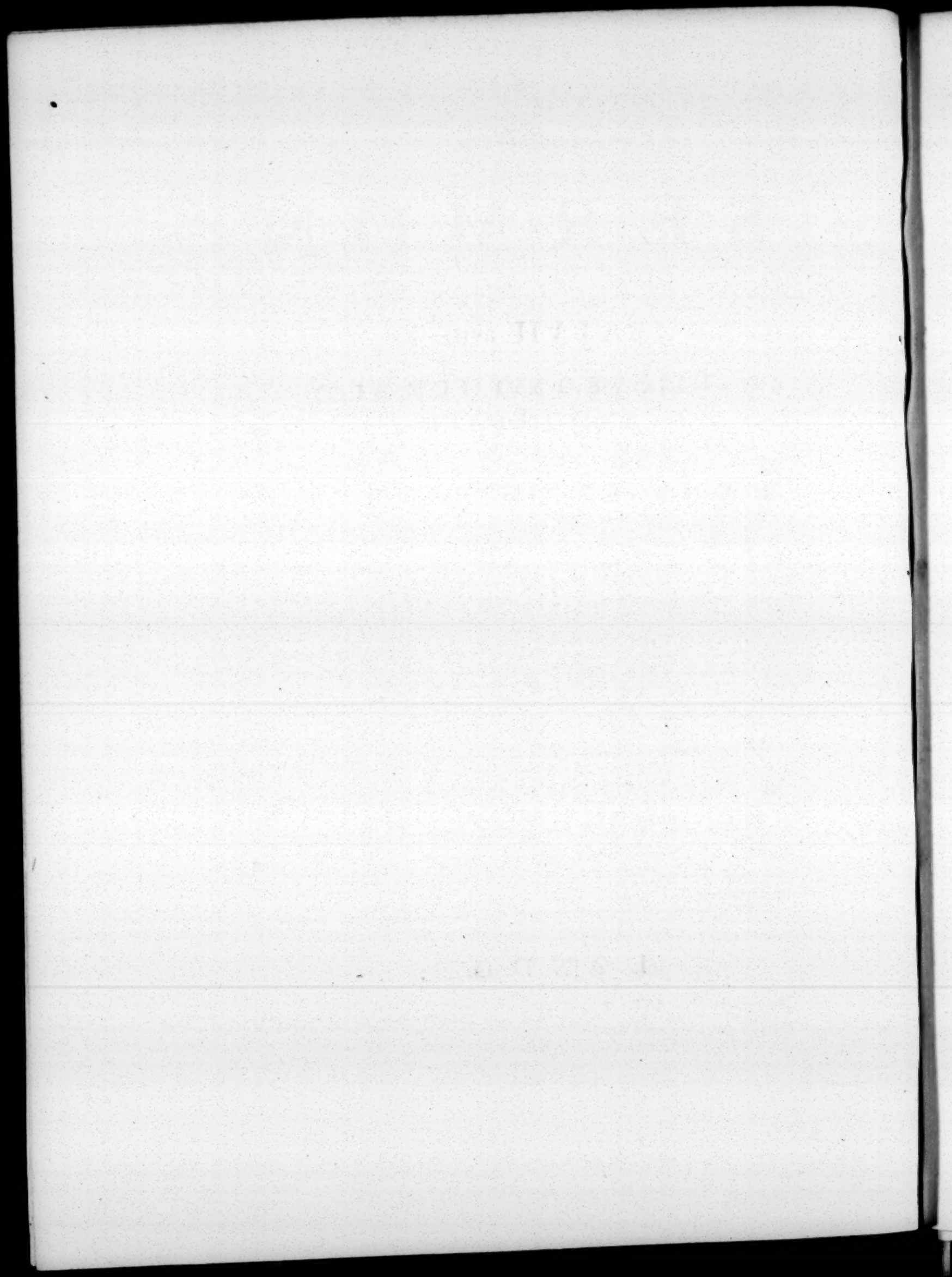
By THOMAS RUTHERFORTH, D.D.

Fellow of St. JOHNS COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE,
and of the ROYAL SOCIETY.

L O N D O N :

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MDCCXLVI.



ISAIAH LVIII. I.

BEHOLD, YE FAST FOR STRIFE
AND DEBATE.

WE are met together to humble ourselves before God for the sin of our fathers, by testifying a just abhorrence of that wicked and rebellious spirit, which carried them on to ruin our constitution in church and state, and by praying that his providence may defend us from the calamities, which they suffered, so long as we keep ourselves innocent from such crimes as may occasion them.

With this pious view our ancestors instituted this fast, and the wisdom of the present government has thought fit to continue it. Let us endeavour to improve it to our advantage, and make a better use of their institution than has been made of it hitherto. For the day of our fast has been a day rather of strife and debate, of contention and mutual reproaches than of humiliation and repentance. The solemn observance of it has been considered more as a mark of distinction, that might

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point out to us something to blame in the conduct of other men, than as an opportunity of correcting what is amiss in our own. We have misapplied it to the purposes of keeping up and increasing divisions amongst ourselves, instead of looking back with abhorrence on those former divisions, which, under the bad management of our fathers, ended in the loss of their religion and liberties.

I cannot charge the fault of abusing this well-intended devotion upon any one party of men; the zealots of all parties have in some respect or other been equally to blame. Many of those, who lament the ruin of our constitution and the unhappy fate of the royal martyr, have been apt to mix a great deal of unchristian bitterness with their christian piety: not contented with expressing their own abhorrence of the principles, which brought on our national calamities, they are industrious to fix these principles upon some of their fellow-subjects; and then, without considering whether the persons marked out as objects of their resentment have deserved these imputations, they treat them as if they were enemies to religion and traitors to their country. Those in the mean time, who are displeased with our devout manner of observing this day, have not been so careful, as they ought to have been, to shew that the charge against them is ill-grounded: their insults and mock-feasts have gone near to justify it; and their whole behaviour has been very unlike what we
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might have expected from men of any religion, or even of common prudence. It is indecent, if we speak of it in the mildest terms we can, to shew such an insolent contempt for a regal government, when they are happy under one; and it is, at least, uncharitable in them designedly to provoke the too forward zeal of those, who differ from them.

Some good and well-meaning men, because of these heats and contentions, have wished to see the observance of this day quite laid aside; imagining, that, when such a public occasion of shewing our resentment is removed, we shall the more easily be brought to live in peace and unanimity with each other. But is the ill use, that has been made of a good institution, any reason for changing it? Shall we blot out of the christian calendar a day, that is set apart for the improvement of ourselves in many christian virtues, only because we have hitherto neglected to make that improvement? Can we find out no way of living peaceably, unless we part with an opportunity of testifying a sincere affection for our excellent constitution of government?—Let us rather act in the case as wise men should do; let us make our behaviour yield to the design of the institution, and not think of making the institution yield to our perverseness. And I am persuaded, that if we were but half as diligent in studying the arts of preserving peace amongst ourselves, as we com-

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monly are in keeping up strife and contentions, we should find that the occasion of the present solemnity is full of a great variety of useful instruction, and that all, who are willing, may employ their thoughts at this time in such a manner, as to be the better subjects and the better christians for this days devotion. With this view it will be very proper to lay before you some duties, of which we ought to be particularly regardful; because they are such as all the servants of God and friends to liberty, those, who desire the increase of true religion, and the continuance of our happy establishment, may join with us in performing: that so we may avoid the reproach of fasting for strife and debate, which the prophet charges upon his own people, and which may with too much justice be charged upon the people of this nation.

The first part of our devotion consists in testifying a just abhorrence of that wicked and rebellious spirit, which carried on our fathers to ruin the constitution in church and state.

The stand, that was made in the beginning of our national troubles to an invasion on the peoples rights, is with many, who are called upon to join with us in this act of religion, a reason for withdrawing themselves. They think there were many oversights and much rashness on the side of the king, and a spirit of liberty on the side of his opposers. But why should they refuse to join with us in lamenting, that these patrons of liberty

ty could find out no other way to prevent the mischiefs, which they feared from the failings of a virtuous and religious prince, besides that fatal one of ruining their country? Why should they refuse to join with us in pitying the misfortunes of the king, to have been so much misled as he was, by the prejudices of his education, and the flattery of his courtiers? Why should they refuse to join with us in admiring the great and uncommon virtues, that appear in his character through all the disguise, in which it has been represented by the malice of his enemies? — Certainly, with all his prejudices and all his faults about him, he must have been a most admirable and excellent person; since they, that have made it their business to observe and collect nothing in his public character, but the rash and ill-advised steps he took, nothing in his private life but his follies and infirmities, have yet been able to object not many faults to him as a king, and have shewn us by what they say of him as a man and a christian, that it would be no unprofitable part of our present employment to fix our attention on his example and learn to copy it.

As to those, who opposed the encroachments, that were attempted to be made on the peoples rights; we reverence their memories, as far they appear to have been actuated by a love of their country. We think it only a human failing in them, that they were liable to be deceived, and
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prone to be misled by wicked and designing men, who pretended to have the same views with them, and to be engaged in the same cause, that they were. And we grieve to find that they could be made at last the instruments of a faction, and could suffer themselves to be hurried on by its rage and violence ; till it was not in their power to prevent the sword, which they had drawn, from recoiling at the blow, and giving a mortal wound to the constitution, which they meant to defend. Men were too much warmed with a sense of real grievances in the beginning of the war, and too much infatuated with the clamour of imaginary ones in the progress of it, to be sensible what evils they were bringing upon their country. Even in the last step, that was taken to destroy our constitution, the deluded people scarce saw that, under the notion of restraining an illegal power usurped by the crown, they were made the tools of private ambition ; and that those seditious and turbulent men, who had put themselves at the head of these unhappy quarrels, and professed to fight the battles of God, were prostituting his holy name to the iniquitous purposes of treason and rebellion. The foundations of the new government, which these factious leaders designed to erect, were already laid in the ruins of the nation ; but the fabric was to be cemented with the blood of their sovereign. And they hoped to sanctify even this traiterous act by bringing a charge
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against him in the name of the people ; and the pageantry of a tryal and a public execution of him were contrived to dazzle the eyes of the unthinking multitude with a shew of justice. They had destroyed our ecclesiastical constitution long before, and, under the pretence of reforming religion, had introduced such a wild enthusiasm and hypocrisy as is inconsistent with the very being of christianity. And now, by accomplishing the death of the king, they dissolved our excellent and happy frame of civil government, and gave us something in its stead, which at first was anarchy and confusion, and when it put on the form of a government, was a lawless and oppressive tyranny.

The wicked and rebellious spirit of that faction, which brought all these calamities upon the nation, is what we detest and disavow : it is our duty at all times to declare our abhorrence of it ; but our present situation recommends this duty to us in a particular manner. If it ever can be of importance to testify our loyalty to our king, our affection for our happy establishment, and our attachment to the pure religion of Christ, it is so now. Upon these principles alone we can be defended ; and upon these we always may be defended ; whether our king and our constitution are attacked, as they were in the days of our fathers, by factions raised at home and nursed up in our own bosom ; or, as they are in our own days, by factions brought home to us, and supported
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by our foreign enemies : whether an attempt is made by the zealous hypocrisy of false brethren amongst ourselves to undermine our religion ; or by the violence of Rome to subvert and destroy it.

I bless God ; there has appeared in all orders and degrees of men in the nation such a hearty and unanimous concurrence in the defence and support of our present establishment, as, from a view of our divisions and causeless jealousies, the friends of our country could not have hoped for, and the enemies of it did not expect to find. These sons of violence, that have set up the standard of rebellion amongst us, and have brought the alarm of war home to our doors, trusted, I suppose, to that restless and changeful temper of our countrymen, which brought on this day's reproach : they overlooked the more valuable parts of our national character, and forgot, that there is no people on earth, that would spend their blood and their treasure, more readily than we would, in the service of a king, who has made himself dear to us. Our affections may be hard to fix ; but, when they are once fixed upon their true principles, they are established upon a rock. For the loyalty of Englishmen is not the forced submission and abject fawning of slaves ; it is the generous return of a free and a brave people for the maintenance of their religion, the protection of their liberties, and the mild administration of that power,

power, which the laws have intrusted in the hands of their kings.

How well our loyalty would be able to hold out, if it was brought to a severer tryal than it has undergone already, God only knows: we have too much reason to fear, that, notwithstanding the warmth and vigour of it, there is one of its best principles wanting to fix and establish it. That zeal for religion, which used to animate us in the defence of our country, is quite extinguished; or if there is any appearance of it on either side, it is on the side of our adversaries: they seem to have nothing so much at heart as propagating a false religion, and we have nothing less at heart than preserving the true one. Our national church was once looked upon as a part, and a favourite part of our constitution; there was a time, when our countrymen would have prided themselves in being members of it, and would have made a warmer return of gratitude for the maintenance of their religion than for all the other numerous blessings, which we derive from the throne. But atheism and infidelity have now made it our pride to be members of no church at all: a contempt of God's word and a neglect of his service, by which the age we live in is most scandalously distinguished, have weakened one of the firmest principles of our attachment to the protestant succession, and have shaken our English loyalty to its very foundation. Our affection for

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religion is changed into a coldness and indifference to it in some, and into a settled hatred and aversion to it in others. The profession of christianity is become an exception to a mans character ; and objections are made to our constitution for supporting and protecting it.

It is in vain, that the ministers of the gospel are called upon in these times of danger to raise in mens minds the same aversion to popery, for which our countrymen have been remarkable ever since the reformation. We have not ceased to represent to them the absurd and impious doctrines of the church of Rome : we recommend to them the wisdom and sanctity of those institutions, which our first reformers sealed with their blood : we exhort them to contend earnestly for the pure and uncorrupted faith of Christ as it is proposed to us in the holy scriptures, and as we received it from our truly good and learned ancestors. But our exhortations have lost their influence : and, notwithstanding any opposition we could make to it, popery would be too likely to find a favourable reception from the people of this nation, if it did not bring with it the chains of arbitrary power and the terrours of an inquisition ; for their disregard to all religion has made it quite a matter of indifference to them what profession of faith and what form of worship are established amongst them, provided they may have the liberty of not conforming themselves to any.

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This national infidelity must be corrected, and a reverence for God's word and obedience to his ordinances must be restored, before there can be any just grounds for believing that the national love of our constitution is the same that it used to be. Men must learn to be good christians in order to be loyal subjects, and must shew that they value the protestant religion, if they desire to have it thought that they are unalterably attached to the protestant succession.

The second duty, which I said the occasion of our present meeting together requires of us, is that of praying to God that his providence may defend us from the same calamities, which our fathers suffered, so long as we keep ourselves innocent from such crimes as may occasion them.

This is one of the wisest and best uses, that can be made of this solemnity; not by the means of it to excite unprofitable and unchristian resentments, nor to renew the unhappy distinctions of party, which a sense of our common danger has at last taught us to lay aside; but to take occasion from it to animate our prayers to God for the safety of our king, the peace of our country, the preservation of our constitution, and the free exercise and profession of our holy religion.

The present happiness of this nation is such, that we might include all these other petitions in praying for the safety and welfare of our king. We depend for the tranquility of our country

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upon the success of his unwearied endeavours to restore it: we are convinced, that the freedom of our constitution can never be more firmly secured than it is under the influence of his mild and legal government; and that his care and protection will continue to us the free exercise of our religion, and the wise and sacred institutions of our national church. The wicked attempt of his enemies has awakened us to a sense of the blessings we enjoy by his means: and the same gratitude, that has now produced such universal professions of affection and loyalty, should always actuate and enliven the devotion of a free people, when they are beseeching God to prolong the life and to prosper the reign of a king, that has from his first accession to the throne made their own laws and customs the invariable measure of his power over them, and has always governed them with the kindness and tenderness of a fond and indulgent parent.

Our fellow-subjects, if they think it their duty to pray to God for any blessing at all, will not be unwilling to join with us in our farther addresses to him, that the peace and welfare of our country may be restored, that our land may not be made the seat of discord and misery, and that our persons and properties may be defended from the violence of invasions from abroad and from the rage and madness of intestine factions at home. Even they, who have hitherto objected to this solemnity,

nity, may be reconciled to it, or will however be pleased with our manner of observing it; if they find, that, instead of endeavouring to keep up unreasonable prejudices in ourselves by such unhallowed petitions as the spirit of party might dictate, we come into the house of God full of ardent wishes for the common good, and join in performing the service of the day that we may recommend our country to the care and protection of heaven.

But it is not the air we breathe or the soil we tread on, that we call our country; nor are they the ordinary gifts of providence, that make it dear to us: other climates produce as plentiful harvests as ours, and are blessed with more kindly seasons and a warmer sun. An Englishman calls no place his country but the seat of liberty, and values none of the ordinary blessings of providence so much as the British constitution. The present attempt, that is made to enslave us, has shewn with how noble a zeal we are prepared to support our laws and government. May the same zeal continue! and, if we take care to fix it upon its true and genuine principles, I make no doubt but it will continue and increase; till we have convinced our enemies, that we inherit the spirit of our ancestors, and would rather chuse to die in defending our liberties than survive the loss of them. But let not a misguided love of our country make us uncharitable to our fellow-subjects.

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Let not the memory of that fatal period, when our constitution was formerly destroyed, betray us into such divisions and animosities, as will certainly weaken it, and may perhaps destroy it again. If this unhappy day, which completed the subversion of our laws and government, and made way for establishing a grievous tyranny upon the ruins of them, should raise in our breasts a warmer affection for liberty than we usually feel, let it not spend itself in the factious employment of reproaching the living or reviling the dead: let it rather break out in humble and earnest petitions to God for the prosperity of our civil establishment; that so a zeal for liberty and the constitution may heighten our devotion, and the calm and gentle spirit of prayer may sanctify the love of our country.

Would to God that all in this nation, who profess themselves to be servants of the same Master, were as well agreed in their sentiments about religious matters, as they are in their affections for the civil constitution of government; that they would all sincerely endeavour to become one fold under one shepherd, and shew themselves to be true disciples of Christ by loving one another! But so long as there are divisions and contentions among us; so long as every one of us continues to say, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ, we must not, either upon this day or upon any other, expect an universal

versal and undissembled concurrence, when we pray to God that we may be protected in the full enjoyment and possession of our religious rights. Yet even they, who are so unhappy as to have separated from our communion, have no reason to be displeased with the petitions we now offer to heaven for the prosperity of the church, to which we belong, and for the continuance and establishment of our holy religion: since the blessing we ask cannot fail to secure every one in the free exercise of that worship, which best approves itself to his own judgment. Persecution is the base and weak effort of a corrupted doctrine or a declining power, and will never be made use of by a church that is founded upon those principles of liberty, which have always distinguished the reformed religion, and that is able to support itself by that generous and charitable temper, which is the perfection of christianity. If we desire to have our church appear what it is, the glory and strength of the reformation, if we desire to take the lead in the protestant cause, and would defend it, as we ought, against the common enemy; let us learn in this conspicuous and important station to behave like kings and not like tyrants, by exerting the power, with which God has strengthened our hands, to protect our protestant brethren from the cruelties and oppression of others, and not to treat them with severity and oppress them ourselves. The time is come, that calls upon us
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to shew how well we deserve the title and the post we have been ambitious of: our brethren of all persuasions have readily joined us in the stand, that is now making against the attacks of popery; but that trust, which providence has reposed in us, and that station, which we never fail to claim in the times of peace and security, require us, as we are sons of the church of England, to undertake much more than our own share of the common danger, and to be prepared, whenever there is occasion, to stand foremost in the breach, and fall the first in defending the protestant religion.

These are the acts of humiliation, repentance and prayer, which our public devotion and the occasion of it may suggest to us. But we should do well to employ some part of the religious leisure, which this day affords us, in searching and enquiring into our own conduct, in finding out what sins we have committed, that may hinder us from receiving the blessings we pray for, and, when we have found them out, in resolving to forsake them.

A public fast is no better than a joint act of hypocrisy; if, whilst we condemn the wickedness of other men, we never think of being sorry for our own; if, whilst we profess to be grieved for the vices of the nation, we cherish the only part of them, that we are sure it is in our power to correct, the part, that each of us has contributed
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towards increasing the common guilt. Vices become national, in the only true and proper sense of the word, when most people, or when all in some degree or other allow of them and practise them : and therefore we are deceived, if we think that any repentance can be national, unless particular persons take care to convince themselves of their own sins, and resolve to turn from the evil of their own doings.

The prevailing vice at present is a contempt of Gods word and a neglect of his service. There are indeed many others, too many to be reckoned up, that call for immediate repentance and reformation as well as this: but I look upon this as the principal one, because it is the source from whence all the rest are derived. For, whatever may be pretended to the contrary, reason might have taught us before, and experience has at last shewn us, that christianity is the surest foundation of moral virtue, and that a general corruption of manners must always follow a decay of religion.

We are the more inexcusable, because the light of the gospel has shone clearer to us, than to any other nation under heaven : and as we have been unfruitful under these gracious means of salvation, we have the more reason to fear that unless we repent and do works meet for repentance, the kingdom of heaven may be taken from us, and that we, who have despised and rejected christianity, when proposed to our belief and practice in its

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greatest purity, may be forced to profess it in its greatest corruption. The errors and superstitions of popery, that were lately brought very near us, are not yet removed to so great a distance as to make us quite secure: perhaps for our offences, if we continue in them, God may yet suffer the darkness, which threatens us, to overspread this church and nation. For do not they, who despise and ridicule the scriptures, deserve to have those scriptures taken from them? Can they, who refuse to believe the word of God, complain, if they are forced to profess they believe the fables and nonsense of legends and traditions? Can they, who seldom receive the blessed sacrament, or who never receive it at all with any devotion, hope that it will be kept free from such absurd doctrines, as must drive all men, that cannot believe a lie, from the Lords table? Can they hope that it will continue to be administered, in the same manner that it is at present, agreeably to the nature of the ordinance and to the institution of Christ? Should not we fear, and act as if we feared, that for the punishment of our sins, the sanctuary of God may be turned into the temple of idols; and that they, who refuse to worship the Father in spirit and in truth, may be compelled to address themselves in all the deformities of superstition to the image of a saint or the relicks of a martyr?

But say I these things as a man, or saith not the scripture the same also? — They, who have
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abused the light, which God has afforded them, have in every age and every nation of the world been judicially deprived of it, and have been left to walk in the darkness of their own foolish imaginations. He has for the present cast away his people Israel for their unbelief, and has given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear. Nor is this method of providence confined to the Israelites only ; for the Gentiles, who from the visible things of the creation might by the help of their own reason have known God, and yet glorified him not as God, have been given over by him to a reprobate mind. And, as the seed of Abraham, which were the natural branches of Christs church, have been broken off because of unbelief ; let us, who from among the Gentiles have been grafted into it, remember, that we can stand only by our faith : and if God spared not the natural branches, let us take heed lest he also spare not us.

Rom. xi.

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Rom. i.

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